

HARDENING OF THE HEART

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Reasons for hardness of hearts and its cures



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[O You who Believe, fear Allah. And let every soul look to what it has sent on for tomorrow. Fear Allah, surely Allah is well-acquainted with what you do. And do not be like those who forgot Allah, so He made them forget their own souls. Such are the rebellious transgressors.]

(Al-Hashr 59:18-19)

(This book is a MODIFIED transcript of a lecture given at Dar al-Arqam, Singapore)

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Foreword – Australian Islamic Library:

The command to purify our hearts from sin has been an essential Islamic teaching known as “purification of the soul” or “tazkiyyat an-nafs”.

Allah SWT says:

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ زَكَّاهَا وَقَدْ خَابَ مَنْ دَسَّاهَا

He has succeeded who purifies the soul, and he has failed who corrupts the soul. (Quran 91:9-10)

And:

يَوْمَ لَا يَنْفَعُ مَالٌ وَلَا بَنُونَ إِلَّا مَنْ أَتَى اللَّهَ بِقَلْبٍ سَلِيمٍ

A day when there will be no benefit in wealth or children, but only in he who comes to Allah with a pure heart. (Quran 26:88-89)

We learn from these verses that our success in the Hereafter depends upon the purification of our hearts in this life. We must purify our hearts from spiritual sins such as greed, malice, envy, arrogance, and worldliness. In their place, we must adorn the heart with spiritual virtues such as generosity, compassion, benevolence, humility, and asceticism.

We therefore consider ourselves very fortunate to present this brief booklet on ways and means to purify and soften our hearts. It is based on a lecture from Dr. Bilal Philips, a renowned Islamic Scholar and founder of Islamic Online University. Transcript has been modified at certain place to suit written form as compared to its original spoken style and to add clarity. We are hopeful that this would serve as a reminder for us to give due consideration the spiritual well-being of our hearts and take steps that bring us closer to our Lord and make us companions in Jannah, inshaAllah.

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SIGNIFICANCE OF HEART

The Prophet Muhammad informed us in a very famous tradition, commonly quoted with reference to *halal* and *haram*, about the importance of the heart. He said:

"There is in the body a clump of flesh - if it becomes good, the whole body becomes good and if it becomes bad, the whole body becomes bad. And indeed it is the heart." [see full hadith in notes on this page¹]

He said that after explaining that the *halal* is clear and that the *haram* is clear and that between them are obscure areas, not known to most people. However, what protects a person from the *haram* and ensures that he remains in the *halal* is knowledge; but beyond knowledge, it is the state of the heart. If the heart is good, then it makes use of the knowledge and it avoids what is prohibited. If the heart is bad, then the knowledge is of no benefit to it and it will indulge in what is prohibited.

The Prophet, on the last pilgrimage, informed his Companions and the nations of Muslims to come, that there is no favor or no special place of the Arab over the non-Arab; nor is there any favor or special position of White over Black, but that favor in the sight of Allah, is

¹ [The hadith in full: Al-Bukhari, Volume 1, Book 2, Number 49: Narrated An-Nu'man ibn Bashir: I heard Allah's Apostle saying, "Both legal and illegal things are evident but in between them there are doubtful (suspicious) things and most of the people have no knowledge about them. So whoever saves himself from these suspicious things saves his religion and his honor. And whoever indulges in these suspicious things is like a shepherd who grazes (his animals) near the Hima (private pasture) of someone else and at any moment he is liable to get in it. (O people!) Beware! Every king has a Hima and the Hima of Allah on the earth is His illegal (forbidden) things. Beware! There is a piece of flesh in the body if it becomes good (reformed) the whole body becomes good but if it gets spoilt the whole body gets spoilt and that is the heart."]

with those who fear Him, those who have taqwa. After bearing witness to that, he said that "*Taqwa is in the heart.*"

In these statements and other similar statements, we find stress being placed on the heart - the heart is the part of the body, which Allah has favored over all other parts. It is the place where *Iman* resides. Had there been in the body another part that was nearer to Allah, *taqwa* would have been placed there because *Iman* is the most valuable thing that a human being can have. There is nothing more valuable than that. It is the determination ultimately of those who have belief in Allah - those who have accepted the message and who have chosen Paradise over Hell. It is the distinction of those who have belief and those who have disbelief.

The value of *Iman* is more than all of the things of this world. This is why the Prophet Muhammad said that for ALLAH to guide by your hands a single person to Islam is worth more than anything in this world. For you to help someone to find Iman is truly worth far more than any of this world and everything that it contains.

WHAT IS OUTSIDE WILL BE JUDGED ON WHAT IS INSIDE THE HEART

The heart is the place by which the correctness of deeds is judged. The Prophet Muhammad said: "*Deeds are judged according to the intention.*" The place of the intention is not on the lips. It is in the heart. [^{**}see notes for the *hadith* in full²]

² Narrated 'Umar bin Al-Khattab: Allah's Apostle said, "The reward of deeds depends upon the intention and every person will get the reward according to what he has intended. So whoever emigrated for Allah and His Apostle, then his emigration was for Allah and His Apostle. And whoever emigrated for worldly benefits or for a woman to marry, his emigration was for what he emigrated for." [Al-Bukhari]

The good deeds that we do and perceive to be a part and parcel of righteousness are judged ultimately by the states of our hearts and our intentions behind these. Allah will inspect the hearts to determine whether they are truly acts of righteousness.³

The Prophet Muhammad had informed us that the first 3 people who would be cast into the Hell Fire are people who were involved in what everybody considers great acts of righteousness. They are the scholar who taught knowledge; the wealthy person who gave from his wealth in charity and the martyr who gave his life fighting in the path of God.

The Prophet Muhammad, in an authentic narration, said that they would be among the first groups of people thrown into the fire because the scholar, when he taught the knowledge that Allah gave him, did not do so for the sake of Allah. This man who had acquired and imparted knowledge and read the Qur'an will be brought forward, Allah will remind him of the favors He had bestowed upon him and the man will acknowledge them. Then He will ask him: *'What did you do to express gratitude for it?'* The man will reply: *'I acquired knowledge and taught it, and read the Qur'an for Your sake.'* Allah will say to him: *'You have lied. You acquired knowledge so that people might call you a learned (man), and you read the Qur'an so that they might call you a reciter, and they have done so.'* Command will then be issued about him, and he will be dragged on his face and thrown into Hell.

³ There are numerous references for this opinion. We have quoted a couple of ahadith below:

"Verily, all actions are but driven by intention and for everyone is what he intended." [Al-Bukhaari and Muslim]

"Certainly, Allah does not look at your shapes (appearance) or wealth. But He only looks at your hearts and deeds." [Al-Bukhaari and Muslim]

Similarly the rich individual will be brought forward- the philanthropist, who was generous with his wealth, used to give for the people to praise his generosity. Allah will remind him of the favors He had bestowed upon him and the man will acknowledge them. He will ask him: *'What did you do to express gratitude for it?'* The man will reply: *'I did not neglect any of the ways You liked wealth to be spend liberally for Your sake'*. Allah will say to him: *'You have lied. You did it so that people might call you generous, and they have done so.'* Command will then be issued about him and he will be dragged on his face and thrown into Hell."

And the martyr - the one whom we all assumed had died *fi sabilillah*. We would think that his place in Paradise is guaranteed. He will be brought forward. Allah will remind him of the favors He had bestowed upon him and the man will acknowledge them. Then He will ask him: *'What did you do to express gratitude for it?'* The man will reply: *'I fought for Your Cause till I was martyred.'* Allah will say: *'You have lied. You fought so that people might call you courageous; and they have done so.'* Command will then be issued about him and he will be dragged on his face and thrown into Hell. [See Ibn Taymiyyah's explanation of this in note⁴]

This is all telling us that ultimately, even the highest of deeds can be of no avail if the hearts are sick; if the hearts are corrupt. So the place of the heart should, in our minds occupy great attention. We have to

⁴ Shaykh Al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah explain this hadith from Sahih Muslim as, "Just as the best of the people are the Prophets, then the worst of the people is the one who imitates them, giving the false impression that he is from them while he is not from them. The best of people after them are the Ulemaa' and the Shuhadaa' and the Siddeeqoon and the Mukhlisoon, and the worst of the people is the one who imitates them while giving the false impression that he is from them, while he is not from them."

spend much of our time observing, reflecting and being aware of the state of our heart.

When the Prophet Muhammad described Abu Bakr as-Siddiq, explaining to the people his status over the rest of them, he said, *"He does not surpass you by performing more prayers and fasts - there are among you those who pray and fast more - but by something which deeply has embedded itself in his heart: Iman in his heart."* That was where his superiority laid.

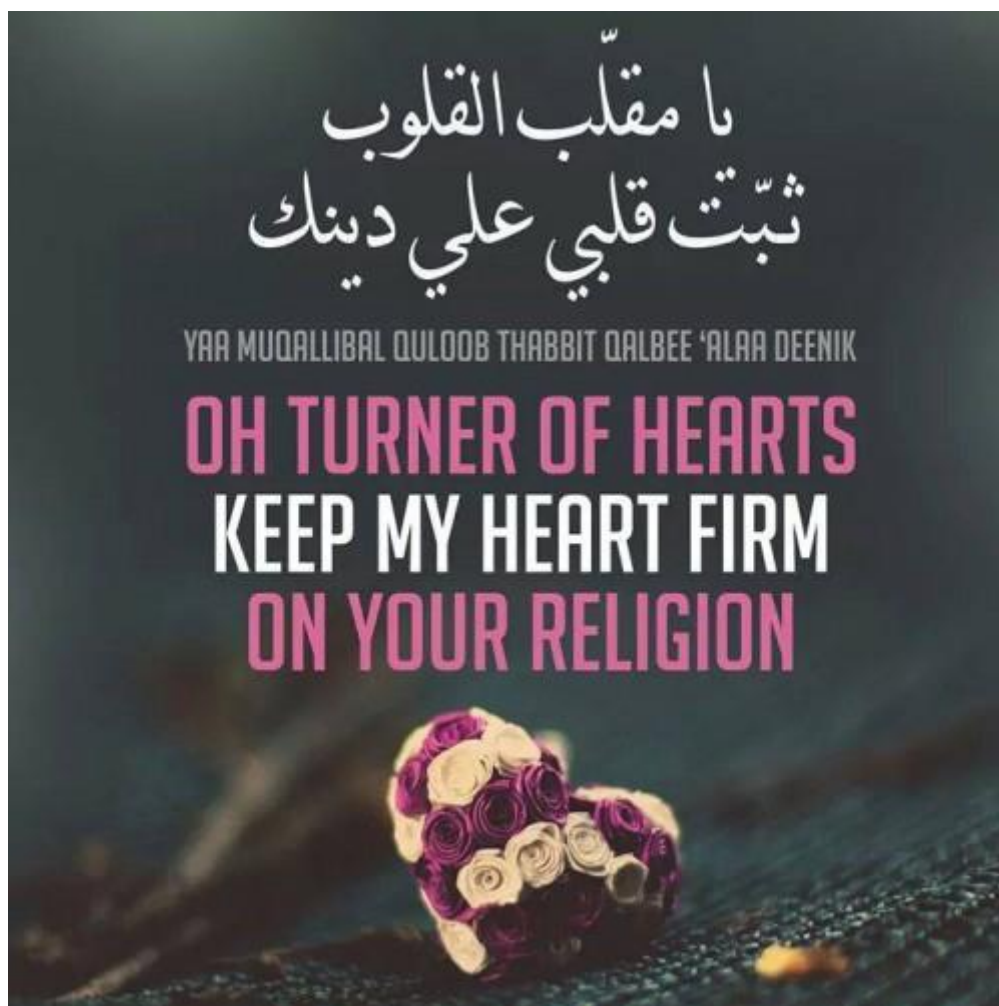
So there is no other faculty in the human body and existence that a believer should be more concerned about. We have to make sure that this faculty is functioning as Allah wishes it to function and should be greatly concerned about it. The Prophet ﷺ used to make *du'a* often, beginning: *"I seek refuge in you, O Allah, from knowledge that does not benefit and from a heart which does not fear."*

The Prophet Muhammad had a very soft heart. He treated people gently. His wives said that they could not recall an incident where he hit them or scolded them harshly. He was known for his gentleness. And Allah confirmed that this quality is an essential quality.

Allah said in the *Qur'an* (3:159):

"Due to Allah's mercy, you are gentle with them. Had you been severe and harsh hearted, they would have fled from around you."

This was the quality of the Prophets and this is the characteristic that all those who seek to guide others to Allah must have. As it was essential for the Prophets, it is essential for us. It is essential for parents, with regard to their children. It is essential for those who seek knowledge and it is essential for every one of us.



With regards to softness of heart towards children, let us see a bright page from seerah. Al-Aqra ibn Habis was once visited by the Prophet Muhammad. The Prophet lifted one of his children and placed the child on his lap. He kissed the child out of the kindness and softness of his heart towards the child. Al-Aqra said, "I have 10 other children and I have not kissed a single one of them." Most people in that time used to consider this a matter of pride and a sign that a person is really tough. The Prophet ﷺ said to him, "Can I help it if Allah has removed mercy from your heart?" He went on to say, "And whoever isn't merciful will not receive mercy."

(It is reported that a little girl in Madinah could hold prophet ﷺ's hand and walk through all Madinah. He would not let her go from his hand unless she let's go his. Sometimes, he used to pray with her granddaughter Umamah in his hands. He used to shorten if a child starts weeping to make it easy for his or her mother. Anas R.A. stayed with him and served him for 10 years. He never asked him why he did something and why he didn't. We can write volumes and volumes on explaining the blessed life of our Prophet of Mercy ﷺ and still won't be able to do justice to its nobility and greatness.)

So it is essential that parents show mercy to their children. And if we look at a home where a father is kind and merciful with his children, we find a home that is full of happiness and joy. Mercy is something that we cannot live without.

While seeking knowledge of the Deen, an obligation on us, a soft heart is a must-have and in its absence, we cannot taste the beauty of true knowledge. As Al-Hasan al-Basri said, "If a man seeks knowledge, it will appear in his face, hands and tongue and in his humility to Allah."

The opposite is true as well – i.e. that nothing corrupts knowledge and da'wa more than the harshness of the heart. Where hearts have become hardened, the knowledge is of no benefit to the individual, nor can that individual benefit others with it. Softness of the heart is the characteristic of true Muslims. If it becomes absent, then a person's life is filled with distress and discomfort. This is the promise of Allah. Those who lack soft hearts will lead woeful lives. As Allah said in *Al-Qur'an*,

"Woe to those whose hearts are hardened against the remembrance of Allah." (39:22)

They are in obvious misguidance. Woe to those whose hearts hear the *Qur'an* and they do not become fearful and humbled as a result of it. Woe to those whose eyes are reminded of the Words of Allah, but they do not weep in fear of Him. Woe to those who are reminded of the Warnings of Allah and they do not humble themselves to His Words.

It is a curse to have a hardened heart and it is a blessing to have a soft heart. Those with hardened hearts suffer in this life, even though they may have all of the trappings of this life. What seems to be an enjoyable life is actually empty - it is filled with loneliness. They cannot find peace of mind and of heart because their hearts have become hardened towards Allah and submitting to Him.

That is why Allah said, "Whoever turns away from my remembrance will have a wretched life." [*Al-Qur'an* 20:124] and,

"Whosoever turns away from My Message, verily for him is a life narrowed down, and We shall raise him up blind on the Day of Judgment."

What is most beneficial in this life is a soft heart. We should strive to achieve it because everything else would be meaningless and useless if we do not have softened hearts.

HOW DO WE ACHIEVE A SOFT HEART?

It is not a secret. It is not something known only to a few, handed down in special sessions and gatherings.

As the Prophet said,

"I have left you on a clear white plain, whose day is like its night. Anyone who deviates from it is destroyed." [See full hadith in notes⁵].

The way of the Prophet clarifies for us how to achieve a soft heart.

THE FIRST WAY: DU'A (SUPPLICATION)

The first method is *du'a* or supplication. Nothing softens the heart more than asking Allah to soften it and make it merciful. This is the promise of the Prophet, *sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam*, when he said:

"Call on Allah being certain that your prayer will be answered, but know at the same time that Allah will not answer the prayer of a heart which is negligent."

Du'a will soften the heart and Allah is the One who will soften the heart. Our *du'a* to Him will be answered, but we have to believe it. If we just raise our hands and ask, "O Allah, soften my heart!" and not really ask from the heart, it is just something we said just like we could have said ANYTHING else! If we call on Allah SINCERELY⁶,

⁵ On the authority of Abu Najih Al-`Irbad ibn Sariyah (may Allah be pleased with him) who said: "The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) gave us a sermon by which our hearts were filled with fear and tears came to our eyes. So we said, 'O Messenger of Allah! It is as though this is a farewell sermon, so counsel us'.

He said, 'I counsel you to have taqwa (fear) of Allah, and to listen and obey [your leader], even if a slave were to become your Amir (leader). Verily he among you who lives long will see great controversy, so you must keep to my Sunnah and to the Sunnah of the Khulafa' Ar-Rashiden (the Rightly Guided Caliphs), those who guide to the right way. Cling to it stubbornly [literally: with your molar teeth]. Beware of newly invented matters [in the religion], for verily every bid`ah (innovation) is misguidance.'" (Abu Dawud and At-Tirmidhi)

⁶ A way to be sincere in our dua is to being humble and doing it in secret: "Call upon your Lord Humbly and in secret" (Quran 7:55),

He will soften the heart. "Call on Me and I will answer you." (Quran 40:60)

"When my servants ask thee concerning Me, I am indeed close to them: I respond to the prayer of every suppliant when he calleth on Me; let them also, with a will, listen to My call and believe in Me: that they may walk in the right way." [Quran 2:186]

If we consider the many examples that we have from the lives of the Prophet ﷺ and his companions, they would show us that only Allah can change the hearts. (We cannot do it ourselves, neither any other human can. We can pray to Allah and he will make it easy for us).

Let us consider the example 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab radi Allah anhu. His attitude towards the Prophet ﷺ and Islam was so harsh that he set out one day to kill the Prophet. He was fed up with the efforts of Prophet to spread Islam that he felt he had to take it in his hands to finish this effort. He strapped on his sword and set out. On his way, he met another companion who told him to check on his own sister before seeing the Prophet ﷺ. He was surprised and went to his sister's house, virtually tearing down the door. He slapped her and her husband until blood came from her face. He then stopped and looked with at what he had caused with grief.

On his way in, he had heard something from the *Qur'an* and it had touched him, but his anger did not allow it a chance to settle in his heart. After he had struck his sister and saw the blood, it stopped him for a minute and provided that break which he need to reflect on what he had heard and touched his heart. He asked his sister about what was being read before and some of the *Qur'an* was read for him. And he changed!

That was enough to turn him upside down. This was 'Umar Radi Allah anhu! On another occasion, the other companions saw him laughing and then crying; one after the other. They asked what had caused that to happen to him. He said. "I remember that in the days of *Jahiliyyah*, I used to have this idol made of dates. One day, I became so hungry that I ate a piece of it. And then, I cried when I remembered digging a hole and burying my daughter. Whilst I was putting her in, she reached up and brushed dirt from my beard." And he had buried her alive. That was the practice those who felt it was a dis-honor to have a daughter killed them. That was how hard his heart was. How hard his heart had become. Hard enough to allow him bury his daughter alive.

But his heart changed and changed so much that 'Umar, when he used to lead the prayers, would be so choked up with tears that people from way back in the third row could hear him crying. This was 'Umar, a man who was so harsh, so powerful, a courageous individual, but with the acceptance of Islam, his heart was turned around.

So we should do as the Prophet advised us to go to Allah and call on him for softened hearts and we should seek refuge as the Prophet had from the heart without fear. And in the same *du'a*, he also sought refuge from the eyes that do not become full with tears; eyes which never cry.

THE SECOND WAY: REMEMBER DEATH

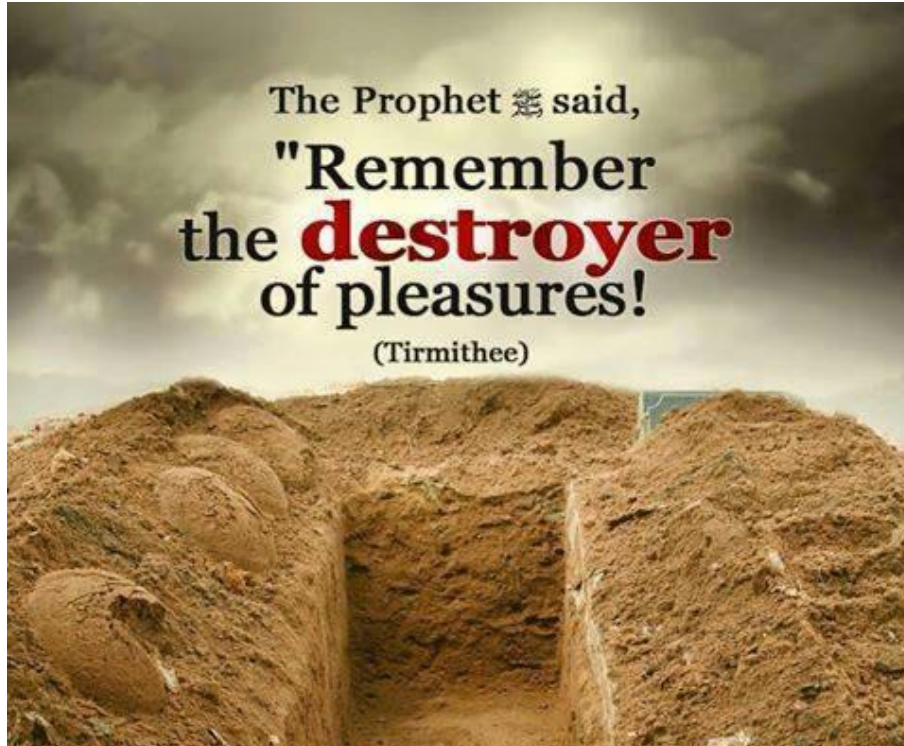
The second way is that we remember the Hereafter and the fact that death is an undeniable reality. We all have to depart this world one day. The one thing that we are one hundred per cent certain of – even if we have some doubt as to whether there is really a God; even if we wrongly wonder if what we are practicing is really the truth

when there are so many other people doing so many other things — we are going to die one day!

But it is so unfortunate that we neglect this reality while living the pleasures of our life and keep ourselves occupied with the matters of this temporary life. As Allah SWT said, the gathering of wealth has deluded them to the realities of life and they only come awake when they end up in their graves.

"The mutual rivalry for piling up (the goods of this world) diverts you (from the more serious things), until ye visit the graves. But nay, ye soon shall know the reality ... " [*Al-Qur'an* 101:1-3]

This is a fearful statement, that we should live our lives being conscious of our deaths and thereby not get lost in trivialities and things that are really ultimately not going to benefit us in our next life.



Consequently, Prophet Muhammad *sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam* had said:

"I [once] had forbidden you from visiting graves, [and I now enjoin] you to do so, so that the visit may serve as a beneficial reminder." [Related by Muslim and others]

" ... for [such visits] soften the heart, bring tears to the eyes, and serve as a reminder of the Hereafter, [but be careful] not to speak forbidden expressions [i.e. while visiting]." [Al-Hakim - *Sahih al-Jami'* 4584]

To go to the graveyard, reflecting on the state of those in the grave (not necessarily of your relatives alone). As the Prophet ﷺ said, *"The grave is either a garden from the gardens of Paradise or a hole from the holes of Hell Fire."* There are people in the graves who are calling out for help but there is no one to help. When Munkar and Nakir come and ask them, "Who is your Lord?", "What is your religion?", "Who was the Prophet that was sent to you?", they will be unable to answer!

The Prophet ﷺ also said:

"When a human being is laid in his grave and his companions return and he even hears their foot-steps, two angels come to him and make him sit and ask him: 'What did you use to say about this man, Muhammad?' He will say: I testify that he is Allah's slave and His Apostle. Then it will be said to him, 'Look at your place in the Hell-Fire. Allah has given you a place in Paradise instead of it.' "

The Prophet added:

"The dead person will see both his places. But a non-believer or a hypocrite will say to the angels, 'I do not know, but I used to say what the people used to say! It will be said to him, 'Neither did you know nor did you take the guidance (by reciting the Qur'an).' Then he will be hit with an iron hammer

between his two ears, and he will cry and that cry will be heard by whatever approaches him except human beings and jinns."

This is not something that we can memorize in preparation for the questions as it is not a matter of knowing or not knowing, it is rather a matter of what our hearts remain filled with in this dunya. We know that the answer is the key for the next life, but we cannot use the key. We don't have access to it because it never entered our hearts in this life. If it did not enter our hearts in this life that Allah is our Lord and that Muhammad ﷺ is our Prophet and that Islam is our religion, then that knowledge will not benefit us in the next life even if we know that.

So we are encouraged to visit the graves and on that basis, this is not unique to men, for the benefits that come from visiting the graves is not unique to men alone. This is why some scholars argue that visiting the graves is not prohibited to women, but that it is the frequent visits that are prohibited, due to the sensitivity of their nature. Hence not regular visits, but to go from time to time as they need the reminder just as men need the reminder.

Allah describes those, in the *Qur'an*, who when they reflect on the Hereafter, are affected. It affects them in the nights. "They slept little in the night and in the hours before dawn, they were found seeking Allah's forgiveness." They wake up in the night with the remembrance of the life to come — the trials of the grave and the judgment to come. This leads them to get up from their beds at a time when sleep is so sweet for many.

Brothers and sisters, let us reflect a little on the life to come. Let us reflect on the process after death and the process in dying itself — how the souls are taken from the bodies of believers, as the Prophet *sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam* described it was " ... like water

dropping from the spout of a bucket"; but for the disbelievers, " ... like silk being drawn over thorns", tearing it away. The soul that fears Allah is taken in the next life up into the Heavens and the angels of the Heavens will praise it. It will return to that body and a Garden from Paradise will be opened up to it and it will lie in that state till Resurrection. But for those whose hearts have hardened towards the remembrance of Allah, the soul will be barred entrance into the Heavens. It will be thrown back into the body. Their evil deeds will come before them as a horrible creature and they will suffer torments. A widow from Hell will be open and the heat will be over them until Resurrection.

And what happens on the Resurrection, when we stand before Allah and answer for each and every deed that we have done, when nothing escapes Allah, when the things that we have in this life will be of no benefit to us. The only thing that will benefit us is to stand before Allah with a healthy heart.

THE THIRD WAY: THE *QUR'AN*

The third way by which we can soften our hearts is the *Qur'an* itself. Allah states in the *Qur'an*, *Al-Hadid*, 57:16:

"Has not the time come for those who believe for their hearts to fear Allah when they hear the *Qur'an* [*dhikrullah* here is in reference to the *Qur'an*] and what truth there is in it, so that they not be like those who received the Scripture before, but in the passage of time, their hearts became hard. And most of them are corrupt."

If we reflect on the *Qur'an*, it has a tremendous power to soften our hearts. Allah said, about the Jinn who heard the *Qur'an*:

"Indeed we heard an amazing *Qur'an*; it guides us to Allah and we believe in it and we will set not partners besides Allah." [*Al-Qur'an* 46:29-32]

Allah goes on to describe the righteous, "And if they (this is amongst the true Christians) hear what was revealed to the Messenger, you will see their eyes welling up with tears because of what they know of the truth of what has been brought." This was the case of the ruler of Ethiopia. When Muslims sought refuge there and they recited a portion of the *Qur'an*, they saw his eyes fill with tears.

This is how we should be. When we hear the *Qur'an*, we should reflect on the meanings. The *Qur'an* should not become for us a replacement for pop songs that we used to hear before. People buy recordings of their favorite reciters for the beauty of their voice!! The listening of the *Qur'an* has become more of a music like thing to entertain ourselves. Allah asks us, "Will they not reflect on the meanings?"

The *Qur'an* is a Book of Guidance and it is in the reflection on the meaning of the *Qur'an* that we benefit, for it is vital for us to re-assess the way we deal with this noble book from our Lord. We should be reading it regularly throughout the year and not leave it until Ramadan. Many people develop a habit of quickly finishing reading the Quran in Ramadan and compromise on understanding its meaning as they deserve to be understood. It really does not matter if we don't finish the *Qur'an* in Ramadan for most of the Prophet's ﷺ life, he did not finish the whole *Qur'an* in Ramadan. Most of the companions did not finish the reading of the *Qur'an* in Ramadan. Today, for us, Ramadan is not complete unless we read the whole *Qur'an* in Ramadan. We hire reciters to recite the *Qur'an* at 99

miles an hour so much so that even Arabic-speaking people cannot sometime figure out where in the *Qur'an* the reciter is!

This has become the precedence — finishing the *Qur'an* in Ramadan and if you can finish it twice, even better! But this is not what the *Qur'an* is for. The *Qur'an* is for reflection, so that when we hear it, as Allah says of the believers who hear the *Qur'an* recited, goose bumps come over their skins. It touches them and causes their heart to tremble.

"Allah has sent down the best statement: a consistent Book wherein is reiteration. The skins shiver therefrom of those who fear their Lord; then their skins and their hearts relax at the remembrance of Allah . That is the guidance of Allah by which He guides whom He wills. And one whom Allah leaves astray - for him there is no guide.." [*Al-Qur'an* 39:23]

If when we listen to the *Qur'an*, we don't find this reaction of tears coming to our eyes, then we should make ourselves cry. Force ourselves to cry because we need to respond to the *Qur'an* in this way. If we don't, we are lost! This is the Word of Allah, the only preserved Word of all the revelations that were given from Adam till now. This is the word of God preserved forever!

We should read the *Qur'an* believing that this is Allah speaking to us. It is Allah talking to us directly. Every time He tells us something about the Jews, we should not (merely) take it as a piece of information, that the Jews are this and the Jews are that. No! Whenever Allah tells us something about the Jews (or another nation), we should see in it as a warning to ourselves so that we don't become like those who disobeyed Allah and went astray. When Allah said, "... *ghayri'l-maghdubi 'alayhim wa la-dhallin* ..." in *Surah Al-*

Fatihah, the Prophet *sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam* explained that *al-maghdub 'alayhim* are the Jews and that *ad-dhallin* are the Christians. Those with whom Allah is angry are the Jews and those who have gone astray are the Christians. Allah is angry with the Jews because they KNOW the truth and they don't act on it, as the Quran says, "Call people to righteousness and you forget yourselves." They changed the book given to them to suit their desires. The Christians are without real knowledge and lost. They think that God is a man!

This is not just about them but a warning to us. Every time we recite these verses, Allah is warning us not to be like them — we have the truth, we have the Scripture, but we are not acting according to them. If we do not seek knowledge, if we do not find out what it is that Allah wants from us, then we are lost. Every time we read the "... *ghayri'l-maghdubi 'alayhim wa la-dhallin* ... ", it should touch us. We should reflect on it and it should penetrate deep into our hearts.

There are plenty of verses throughout the *Qur'an* that remind us of the Hereafter, that remind us of the signs of the Day of Judgment and what comes afterwards. It is enough for us to open almost any part of the *Qur'an* to be able to find and read about them. In virtually every chapter of the *Qur'an* Allah addresses the next life. It is linked to our second point of visiting the graves and remembering the Hereafter. The *Qur'an* speaks about the life to come and invites us to reflect on it.

THE FOURTH WAY: GOOD DEEDS

The fourth way for us to soften our hearts is by way of doing good deeds. Righteous deeds done sincerely for Allah will soften our hearts. In the initial stages, maybe we can't see how it softens our hearts, but we have to stick with it and believe. As the Prophet ﷺ told

us, that the slave of Allah does not come closer to Him except by doing the deeds that He has made compulsory for him.

(In a hadith al-qudsi, Allah SWT says:

“My servant draws not near to Me with anything more loved by Me than the religious duties I have enjoined upon him, and My servant continues to draw near to Me with supererogatory works so that I shall love him. When I love him I am his hearing with which he hears, his seeing with which he sees, his hand with which he strikes and his foot with which he walks. Were he to ask [something] of Me, I would surely give it to him, and were he to ask Me for refuge, I would surely grant him it. I do not hesitate about anything as much as I hesitate about [seizing] the soul of My faithful servant: he hates death and I hate hurting him.”[Bukhari])

The compulsory deeds include the 5 daily prayers, the fast, zakah, hajj and other obligatory duties. Their benefits, if not visible immediately, accumulate and grow overtime. We need to persist with making sincere efforts to improve our engagement in the mandatory efforts, keep trust in Allah and use them as means to purify ourselves and restrain us from the evil.

Similar is the case of righteous deeds. It is to be understood and remembered that the first of the righteous deeds are the ones that God has commanded and which His beloved prophet ﷺ performed. It is a mistake to go to the things that Allah and His messenger ﷺ have not prescribed for us to do and to put all our focus on these areas leaving the primary things that are commanded us to do. If we have not established 5 times daily prayers on time, then it does not matter whatever else we do. It is useless. This is the foundation — if we cannot do what Allah has commanded us to do and what has demanded of us as Muslims, then how can we please Him in

anything else? Then, for us (there is a misconception that), pleasing God is according to what we think would please us. This is not pleasing God. We have to remember that the Prophet *sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam* told us, "*The Hell Fire is veiled by the things that are pleasing to us and Paradise is veiled by the things that we do not like.*"

"*Things that we do not like*" are not necessarily those things that are evil, but those that our own *nafs* does not like because they require work and effort. We like the easy way. So we would like not to pray and if someone were to tell us that it is not necessary to pray, we would say "Alhamdulillah!" This is our nature — we would be happy with that. On contrary, we should be sad because we can only pray in this life and in the next, chance to pray would not be there anymore. In the next life, people will want to pray and beg Allah for that. Allah describes those who come before him for judgment: when they see their deeds and they know that they have put themselves in Hell. What will they do? Will they argue with Allah and ask why He has put them in Hell? No, they will ask Allah for another chance to go back and do what Allah had told them to do and more.

"Do they await except its result? The Day its result comes those who had ignored it before will say, "The messengers of our Lord had come with the truth, so are there [now] any intercessors to intercede for us or could we be sent back to do other than we used to do?" They will have lost themselves, and lost from them is what they used to invent." (Quran 7:53).

But Allah will know that they are lying for they would do the same if sent back. For if Allah were to send us back, He will not send us back with the knowledge that we have then. He would send us back just as we were before.

Prayer is for OUR own benefit. When we pray, we are not benefiting Allah in any way but our own selves. If every human being on this earth prayed, it would not increase or benefit Allah in any way, just as if nobody prayed, it would not decrease or affect Allah in any way. Prayer is for purely for OURSELVES. That is why the Prophet used to say, "Bilal, give us ease by giving the call to prayer." Prayer was considered a time of pleasure but for (many of) us perceive it to be a burden. The sooner we finish the better we consider it. That is a big mistake and a sign that our hearts have become hard.

Allah SWT mentions about the Jews that after all the signs that were given to them, with the passage of time, their hearts became hard. Our hearts have become hard too. We have accepted Islam (or were born as Muslims), we were awakened to Islam and we started to practice Islam, but with passing time, our hearts have become hardened.

"Has not the time arrived for the Believers that their hearts in all humility should engage in the remembrance of Allah and of the Truth which has been revealed to them, and that they should not become like those to whom was given The Book aforetime, but long ages passed over them and their hearts grew hard? For many among them are rebellious transgressors." [Al-Qur'an 57:16]

Iman increases and decreases with time. It is natural. The heart hardens, we fight against it and it softens again. This cycle continues and is a continual struggle until we die. We pray that we die with hearts that are soft and fearful. We have to keep struggling and it is in this struggle that ultimately we do taste *iman*; that we do taste what was the real salah prescribed for us; what the remembrance of Allah should mean in our lives. The Prophet ﷺ describes those who receive the shade of Allah's Throne on the day when there is no shade as the one who remembers Allah and cries. His heart is soft.

The Prophet said:

"Allah will give shade, to seven, on the Day when there will be no shade but His. (These seven persons are) a just ruler, a youth who has been brought up in the worship of Allah (i.e. worships Allah sincerely from childhood), a man whose heart is attached to the mosques (i.e. to pray the compulsory prayers in the mosque in congregation), two persons who love each other only for Allah's sake and they meet and part in Allah's cause only, a man who refuses the call of a charming woman of noble birth for illicit intercourse with her and says: I am afraid of Allah, a man who gives charitable gifts so secretly that his left hand does not know what his right hand has given (i.e. nobody knows how much he has given in charity), and a person who remembers Allah in seclusion and his eyes are then flooded with tears." [Sahih Al-Bukhari, vol. 1, book 11, #629]

So we should not shy away from good deeds for they will help to soften our hearts. The Prophet *sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam* had said that greeting our brothers or sisters with a smiling face is *sadaqa*⁷. Nothing

⁷ There are numerous forms of Sadaqa and charity. It is one of the great means to purify our hearts. Following are a few ahadith concerning this:
Allah said:

وَسَيُجَنَّبُهَا الَّذِي يُوْتِي مَالَهُ يَتَزَكَّى

But the righteous one will avoid Hellfire, who gives from his wealth to purify himself.

Surah Al-Layl 92:17-18

And Allah said:

خُذْ مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ صَدَقَةً تُطَهِّرُهُمْ وَتُزَكِّيهِمْ بِهَا وَصَلِّ عَلَيْهِمْ

Take from their wealth a charity by which you cleanse them and purify them, and invoke blessings upon them.

Surah At-Tawbah 92:103

should be too small for us. No good deed is so trivial that we scorn at it. We should strive to do every good deed and collect hasanat from where-ever we get an opportunity.

But we should begin with the things Allah has made compulsory. We should establish the *salah* as Allah prescribed it; we have to establish our *zakah* as it is supposed to be given and in the way it is prescribed to us; we have to fast as it is supposed to be done and the *hajj* and *umrah* if we are able. These fundamentals have to be established for

When we give away our wealth in charity, this removes worldliness from our hearts and envy of what others have and it makes us hope for our good deeds stored in the Hereafter. Charity means not only giving wealth, but also giving people your time, your effort, your work, and even a smile or a kind word.

Jabir ibn Abdullah reported: The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said:

كُلُّ مَعْرُوفٍ صَدَقَةٌ وَإِنَّ مِنْ الْمَعْرُوفِ أَنْ تَلْقَى أَخَاكَ بِوَجْهِ طَلْقٍ وَأَنْ تُفَرِّغَ مِنْ دَلُوكَ فِي إِثْنَاءِ أَخِيكَ

Every good deed is charity. Verily, it is a good deed to meet your brother with a smiling face, and to pour what is left from your bucket into the vessel of your brother.

Source: Sunan At-Tirmidhi 1970, Grade: Sahih

Charity is a duty upon every Muslim, for every person can give something from his wealth, time, and energy. At the very least, Muslims can refrain from harming others and that is also charity.

Abu Huraira reported: The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said:

كُلُّ سَلَامَى مِنَ النَّاسِ عَلَيْهِ صَدَقَةٌ كُلَّ يَوْمٍ تَطْلُعُ فِيهِ الشَّمْسُ قَالَ تَعْدِلُ بَيْنَ الْاِثْنَيْنِ صَدَقَةٌ وَتُعِينُ الرَّجُلَ فِي دَانِيَةٍ فَتَحْمِلُهُ عَلَيْهَا أَوْ تَرْفَعَ لَهُ عَلَيْهَا مَنَاعَهُ صَدَقَةٌ قَالَ وَالْكَلِمَةُ الطَّيِّبَةُ صَدَقَةٌ وَكُلُّ خُطْوَةٍ تَمْشِيهَا إِلَى الصَّلَاةِ صَدَقَةٌ وَتُمِيطُ الْأَذَى عَنِ الطَّرِيقِ صَدَقَةٌ

Charity is due upon every joint of the people for every day upon which the sun rises. Being just between two people is charity, and helping a man with his animal and lifting his luggage upon it is charity, and a kind word is charity, and every step that you take towards the mosque is charity, and removing harmful things from the road is charity.

Source: Sahih Muslim 1009, Grade: Sahih

the sake of Allah; they provide the foundation for the softening of the heart. As we continue to do these acts and voluntary versions of these acts, we come closer and closer to Allah, until Allah says He becomes the eyes with which we see, where we see only the things that Allah wants us to see. We avoid the things that Allah does not want us to see; we turn away from them; we don't enjoy them. We only touch the things Allah wants us to touch; we only take what Allah wants us to take; we only go to places that Allah wants us to go ... If we turn to Allah and we call on Him He will answer our prayer. This is the promise of the Prophet *sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam*.

So my brothers and sisters, I ask you and myself to remember our hearts; to reflect on the state of our hearts. Whenever we have a moment, question: what state are we in? We have to work on our hearts until we succeed in softening them, by the mercy and the grace of Allah. We begin that process by turning to Allah now. In our next prayer tonight, let us turn back to Allah and beg him sincerely to soften our hearts and when we do so, if we are sincere, our hearts will begin to soften. It is the promise of Rasulullah *sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam*. We should read the *Qur'an* and do as much as we can of righteous deeds. We should reflect on the next life by visiting the graves and by reading the verses addressing them; by reading the statements of the Prophet *sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam* about the next life. We should do these things and strive to soften our hearts. As I said before, if after doing them we cannot find softness in our hearts, then we need to make ourselves cry. We need to force ourselves to cry⁸ because until we can let go and let loose those feeling within ourselves, then the hearts cannot become soft.

⁸ According to a narration: "A man who weeps for fear of Allah will not enter Hell" (Tirmidhi)

(Quran explains the believers as:

“And they fall upon their faces weeping, and the Qur'an increases them in humble submission.” [Quran 17:109])

So I pray and I ask Allah to give us all soft hearts, hearts that are filled with mercy for the creation of Allah, our children, our parents, our brothers and sisters in Islam ... even those towards people who are not Muslims. I ask Allah to put in our hearts softness towards them in the sense that it would guide us to carry the message to them as we should. I ask Allah to give us success to turn back to the *Qur'an*, to read it regularly, seeking understanding and guidance from it and I ask Allah to give us soft hearts.

Weeping in the fear of Allah has been a Sunnah and practice of the righteous predecessors. Faddalah ibn Sayfi R.A. used to weep a great deal. A man entered upon him when he was weeping and said to his wife: “What is the matter with him?” She said: “He says that he wants to undertake a long journey and he does not have proper provision for it.”

Hudhayfah (may Allah be pleased with him) used to weep intensely, and it was said to him: “Why are you weeping?” He said: “I do not know what is ahead of me – Divine pleasure or divine wrath.”

Sa’d ibn al-Akhram said: I was walking with Ibn Mas’ood and he passed by the blacksmiths, who had brought a piece of iron out of the fire. He stood and looked at the molten iron and wept.

Isma’il ibn Zakariya described Habeeb ibn Muhammad, who was a neighbour of his. He said: “Every evening I heard him weeping and every morning I heard him weeping, so I went to his wife and said: ‘What is the matter with him? He weeps in the evening and he weeps in the morning!’ She said to me: ‘By Allah, when evening comes he fears that he will not live till morning and when morning comes he fears that he will not live till evening.’”



إِنَّ الْمُؤْمِنَ إِذَا أَذْنَبَ كَانَتْ نُكْتَةً سَوْدَاءُ فِي قَلْبِهِ فَإِنْ تَابَ وَنَزَعَ وَاسْتَغْفَرَ صُقِلَ قَلْبُهُ
فَإِنْ زَادَ زَادَتْ فَذَلِكَ الرَّأْيُ الَّذِي ذَكَرَهُ اللَّهُ فِي كِتَابِهِ

Verily, when the believer commits a sin, a black spot appears upon his heart. If he repents and abandons the sin and seeks forgiveness, his heart will be polished, but if he increases in sin, the blackness increases. That is the covering which Allah has mentioned in his Book: Nay, but on their hearts is a covering because of what they have earned. (83:14)

Source: Sunan ibn Majah 4244

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